



## Barrowman, John (b. 1967)

by Linda Rapp

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Accomplished actor and singer John Barrowman has won plaudits as a musical theater star, as well as for his roles in film and television. He is especially known for his extremely skillful interpretations of the works of Cole Porter, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Stephen Sondheim.

A native of Glasgow, Scotland, Barrowman was born on March 11, 1967. He spent much of his youth in Aurora, Illinois after his father, employed by the Caterpillar construction equipment company, was transferred to the United States.

Barrowman first became captivated by theater when he saw *Peter Pan* (book by James M. Barrie, music by Moose Charlap and Jule Styne, lyrics by Carolyn Leigh, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green) as a small child in Glasgow. His initial acting experience came in a high school play, but he was planning to study to become a teacher. Before he entered college, however, he attended a production of Michael Bennett's *Dreamgirls* (book and lyrics by Tom Eyen, music by Henry Krieger) with his mother, who commented afterward that she believed that a career in theater was what he really wanted. Barrowman acknowledged that it was true, and the die was cast.

He enrolled in the musical theater program at United States International University in San Diego, California. During the summers after his first and second years at college, he sang and acted in shows at the Nashville theme park Opryland USA.

In 1989 he went to London on a study-abroad program to train in the works of Shakespeare, but when he won a role in a West End production of Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* (book by Guy Bolton, P. G. Wodehouse, and Russel Crouse), starring opposite Elaine Paige, he had the break that launched his career.

Barrowman remained in England, performing in many musicals, including the London productions of Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil's *Miss Saigon* (book by Schönberg and Boublil, music by Schönberg, lyrics by Boublil and Richard Maltby, Jr.), Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera* (book and lyrics by Richard Stilgoe and Andrew Hart, music by Lloyd Webber), the twenty-fifth anniversary revival of Galt MacDermot's *Hair* (book and lyrics by Gerome Ragni and James Rado, music by MacDermot), Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard* (book and lyrics by Don Black and Christopher Hampton, music by Lloyd Webber), and the 2004 revival of John Kander and Fred Ebb's *Chicago* (book by Ebb and Bob Fosse; lyrics by Ebb; music by Kander). He also appeared in an Oslo production of Lloyd Webber's *Evita* (book and lyrics by Tim Rice, music by Lloyd Webber).

Even as he became an established star in the West End, he worked on two BBC children's television programs, *Live & Kicking* and *Electric Circus*. He also hosted *The Movie Game* and a magazine show, *5's Company*, on British television.

Producers from CBS television who saw Barrowman in the London production of *Sunset Boulevard* brought



John Barrowman.  
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the handsome young actor back to the United States in 1995 to appear in a series called *Central Park West*, which was soon canceled. While Barrowman was in New York for filming, however, he made his Broadway debut in *Sunset Boulevard*.

Barrowman appeared in another American television show, *Titans*, a prime-time soap opera that had only a short run in 2000.

He focused his energy on stage work, both in Britain and the United States, with great success. He was nominated for a Laurence Olivier Award for Best Actor for his performance in *The Fix* (book and lyrics by John Dempsey, music by Dana P. Rowe) in 1997 and won a Backstage West Garland Award in 1998 for his work in the Los Angeles production of the Stephen Sondheim revue *Putting It Together*.

He also scored in Trevor Nunn's 2002-2003 revival of *Anything Goes* at the National Theatre, where he reprised the role of Billy Crocker in which he had made his West End debut in 1989. Nunn also directed Barrowman's Shakespearean debut as Dumaine in *Love's Labor's Lost*, which played in repertory with *Anything Goes*.

Barrowman has also performed in numerous concerts and revues and cabaret evenings. He is especially known for his interpretations of Sondheim. Not only did he star with Carol Burnett and Bronson Pinchot in the Los Angeles and Broadway productions of *Putting It Together*, but he also participated in the Sondheim celebrations in 2002 at both Lincoln Center in New York and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D. C. He starred in the Kennedy Center production of Sondheim's *Company*, and also gave a memorable concert at Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage.

He also participated in a well-received concert version of William Finn's song cycle *Elegies* in London in 2004.

Although Barrowman's singing had been included on many cast albums and compilation recordings, he launched his solo recording career in 1998 with a mini-CD, *John Barrowman: Aspects of Andrew Lloyd Webber*. His first full-length album, *John Barrowman: Reflections from Broadway* (2000), is a compilation of songs from the shows in which he has appeared.

On his next album, *John Barrowman Swings Cole Porter* (2004), he gave an accomplished and nuanced interpretation of Porter's compositions. Barrowman was touched by the poignancy of Porter's writing about his love for other men in his songs, and his performances of the works are rendered with great sensitivity and imagination.

The release of the Porter album coincided with Barrowman's appearance in Irwin Winkler's film biography of Porter, *De-Lovely*. In it Barrowman had a role as one of the composer's lovers and sang "Night and Day" with Kevin Kline, who starred as Porter.

Barrowman's cinematic work also includes Susan Stroman's film of Mel Brooks's *The Producers* (2005), in which, wearing blue contact lenses and with his hair bleached blond, he fronts the "Springtime for Hitler" number.

Among Barrowman's recent theatrical roles is that of the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* (book by Linda Wolverton, music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice). He commented that the part "was a thrill because the kids were enthralled by it"--an echo of his early enchantment with theater upon seeing *Peter Pan*.

An accomplished ice skater, Barrowman was one of ten celebrities who accepted a 2006 challenge to

compete on Britain's ITV television program, *Dancing on Ice*. Partnered with a professional skater and coached by the legendary Olympic team of Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean, Barrowman and his partner Olga Sharutenko were expected to do very well. However, they were eliminated from the competition fairly early on.

Barrowman scored a hit on British television in 2006 in *Torchwood*, a spin-off of the science-fiction series *Doctor Who*, in which he appeared as Captain Jack Harkness, a time-traveller from the 51st century who was posing as an R.A.F. pilot during the London Blitz where he met the other characters (also time travellers) who were also visiting the same time period.

Of his character, Barrowman said, "Jack's a bit of a player. The writer, Russell T. Davies, joked that Jack would sleep with anybody. He doesn't differentiate between the Doctor or Rose--or aliens!"

Barrowman is a strong supporter of organizations that encourage young people to become involved in the arts. He is a member of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme in the United Kingdom and a driving force in the Dreamers Workshops in the United States. In the workshops, Barrowman stated, "We try to teach kids life skills though theater skills. It helps make children more motivated, as well as more accepting of other people's culture, race, creed, whatever."

Barrowman also vigorously supports glbtq rights. He has stated that he realized that he was gay when he was eight or nine years old but only came out to his parents at twenty-two. The entire family was extremely supportive, and Barrowman continues to enjoy a very close relationship with his parents, his siblings, and their children.

In his show business career, Barrowman has always been completely honest about his sexuality. As he told *Gay Times* interviewer Rupert Smith in 2004, "There's a received idea that being openly gay in the TV industry will limit your ability to get work, but I decided early on that I wouldn't hide anything. If you lie about yourself, then people are going to work very hard to expose that lie. If you're honest, it's not an issue and you can just get on with your life. . . . As far as the public goes, they see me playing different characters, some straight, some gay. They can make their own assumptions."

Ironically, he lost one coveted television role because he was perceived as "too straight." He was turned down for the role of Will in the NBC sitcom *Will and Grace*. Heterosexual actor Eric McCormack was cast in the role.

When Britain legalized same-sex unions in 2005, Barrowman announced his plans to enter into a civil partnership with architect Scott Gill, his companion for fourteen years. Barrowman then avoided the use of the word *marriage* for gay unions because, he said, "It's something that has the connotation of religion, and religion is something that hates or dislikes gay people. . . . Why would I want to have a word like that connected with me and Scott?"

The two registered as civil partners in Cardiff on December 27, 2006. The brief ceremony was followed by a small gathering of family and friends.

On July 2, 2013, however, Barrowman and Gill married in California, soon after the Supreme Court of the United States' rulings that permitted the resumption of same-sex marriages in California and struck down the Defense of Marriage Act.

Barrowman and Gill hope eventually to become parents, either through adoption or surrogacy.

In 2008, Barrowman was featured in a BBC documentary entitled, "John Barrowman: The Making of Me," that featured his personal quest to understand why he is gay. As he commented, although he is perfectly

comfortable with his sexuality, he is nevertheless interested in questions related to the cause of homosexuality: is it nature or nature?

The documentary follows Barrowman as he travels to Chicago and Los Angeles and London to look into various theories. While the documentary offers no definitive answers, it provides a lot of information in an interesting format.

On June 14, 2014, it was announced that Barrowman had been honored as a Member of the British Empire (MBE) by Queen Elizabeth II. He was recognized for his contributions to "light entertainment and charity."

Barrowman and Gill live in London.

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